

The Sailors' Snug Harbor, Dormitory and
Administration Building (Building C)
Richmond Terrace
New Brighton
New York
Richmond County
New York

HABS No. NY-5476

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NY,
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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
801 19th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20006

THE SAILORS' SNUG HARBOR, DORMITORY AND
ADMINISTRATION BUILDING (BUILDING C)

Address: Richmond Terrace, between Tysen Avenue and Delafield Place, New Brighton, New York, Richmond County, New York.

Present Owner: The Trustees of The Sailors' Snug Harbor in the City of New York.

Present Occupant: The Sailors' Snug Harbor.

Present Use: Dormitory and administrative offices.

Statement of Significance: The Sailors' Snug Harbor is a home for aged seamen opened on Staten Island in 1833. This building, the first to be constructed for the institution, was built from 1831 to 1833. It is one of an outstanding group of five Greek Revival dormitories which overlook the Kill Van Kull leading into New York Harbor.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Original and subsequent owners: See photo-data book for The Sailors' Snug Harbor, HABS No. NY-5473, for this information.
2. Date of erection: On October 11, 1831, the cornerstone of the building was laid. The New-York Evening Post published on October 29, 1831, the following account of the ceremony, taken from the Daily Advertiser:

Sailors Snug Harbor---. . . On Wednesday last, the cornerstone of the edifice to be erected was laid. --The Trustees, with the Mayor, and a number of distinguished gentlemen were present. An address was delivered by the Rev. Mr. Barrian, after which Chancellor Walworth performed the ceremony of laying the corner stone, and made a very appropriate speech, and the Rev. Dr. Phillips offered up a prayer. The building now to be erected will be the centre to which two wings are to be added. It is intended that the Retreat will be finished next fall, when sick and disabled seamen will find a home for life

On August 1, 1833, the institution was formally opened; and on August 10, 1833, the New-York and Richmond County Free

Press published the following account:

This interesting Institution was opened for the reception of "old and worn-out infirm seamen on Thursday, the 1st inst. with appropriate religious services, in the presence of the Trustees, the reverend clergy of Staten Island, and a number of persons residing in the neighborhood. The centre building of the contemplated edifice is completed, and will accommodate about two hundred beneficiaries with comfort and convenience; but at present, the number is limited to fifty, for whom the actual income will amply provide, though it is confidently expected that it will increase commensurate with the suitable subjects to be supported. . . .

2. Architect: In Greek Revival Architecture in America Talbot Hamlin wrote that "according to family tradition, Martin Thomson was the architect for Sailors' Snug Harbor on Staten Island . . ."

3. Builder, suppliers: The New-York and Richmond County Free Press of August 10, 1833, reported that

It is creditable to Mr. Samuel Thompson the carpenter, and Mr. Peter Storms, the mason, that they have given complete satisfaction to the Trustees, for their taste and talent in the erection of this Snug Harbor for worn-out sailors.

4. Original plans and construction of the building: In the "Annual Report of the Trustees of the Sailors' Snug Harbor" for 1831, it was reported that

The Trustees have built a dock on the premises and have commenced the main building (for the Asylum for aged and worn out seamen) sixty-five by one hundred feet.

Disbursements for that same year included the following items:

Paid J.R. Houseman, on account of the farm purchased for the Asylum	\$5,000.00
for building dock and making road to Asylum	2,138.06
building materials, mason work and labor for the Asylum	7,075.25
premium for an approved plan of the Asylum	50.00

In the "Annual Report" of 1832 the Trustees reported that

The main building for the asylum is completely under cover, with the exception of the portico which is not finished. The mason work in the interior of the building is finished, all to putting on the hard finish on the walls and basement part of the first story and the hall and dome. The carpenter's work of the interior is jobbed out by contract; and the interior may be finished by the first of July 1833 or before that time.

Disbursements for 1832 showed an additional expenditure of \$21,604.67 for "Sundry payments for building the Asylum."

In the "Annual Report" for 1833, the disbursements included \$13,271.03 "for building materials, mason work, labor &c. for asylum."

In the "Annual Report" for 1834 the Trustees noted that

There is [sic] now in the Snug Harbor, fifty-four aged and disabled seamen, who are entitled to support under provision of Mr. Randall's "will"; and the doors of the Snug Harbor are open to further applicants. Those aged men are plentifully fed, comfortably clothed, and supplied with every thing requisite to soothe their declining years.

5. Alterations and additions: The following description from Harper's New Monthly Magazine, January, 1873, described the interior arrangement of this building at that time:

Ascending the broad marble steps, we entered a large hall in the main building, lighted from above by a large oval window in the cupola, and occupied with chairs and benches placed across the floor, and leaving a narrow passageway along the wall on either side. Just inside the door, and fronting the benches, was a reading-desk of oak with a red velvet cushion, and in the rear stood, on either side of the opposite door, two vases of terra cotta, filled with shrubs and flowers. A gallery went round the hall on all sides, at the height of the second floor, and above that was the cupola and skylight. . . .

The following account from the History of Richmond County, edited by Richard M. Bayles and published in 1887, indicates how the building was used at that time:

In the central building are located, on the ground floor, the governor's suite of offices, the reception rooms,

library and reading rooms, all opening out of the grand entrance hall, which rises to the full height of the building and is surmounted with a dome. This hall and the principal rooms are handsomely embellished in fresco and stained glass; the designs, though varied in subject, are mainly of a nautical and astronomical character. Facing you, upon entering, stands the marble bust of the founder. In the reception room hang the portraits in oil of the former governors of the institution and other paintings. This hall, about fifty feet in depth, is bisected by another, which extends east and west through the entire chain of the five connected buildings; about five hundred feet from which there is an entrance to the chapel for morning and evening service. This is also tastefully and appropriately decorated.

6. Important old views:

- a. Print published in Copy of the Will and Testament of the Late Rob't Richard Randall, Esq. . . . New York: Published by Order of the Trustees, 1842. (See HABS photocopy in photo-data book for The Sailors' Snug Harbor, HABS No. NY-5473).
- b. In a scrapbook entitled "Views, New York City. Richmond County" there are two views--one from the east, one from the northeast. Local History Room, New York Public Library.
- c. Photograph of dormitory facades. Negative 212023A, Map and Print Room, New-York Historical Society.
- d. Print of "Bird's-Eye View, Of Sailors Snug Harbor, N.Y., A. M. Pettit." Staten Island Historical Society.
- e. Three photographs of dormitory facades, dated "c. 1890." Staten Island Historical Society.

B. Bibliography

Note: See photo-data book for The Sailors' Snug Harbor, HABS No. NY-5473, for additional bibliographical material.

Bayles, Richard M., editor. History of Richmond County. 1887.

Documents of the Senate of the State of New-York. Albany: 1831-1835.

Hamlin, Talbot. Greek Revival Architecture in America. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1964.

"Sailors' Snug Harbor," New-York and Richmond County Free Press,
August 10, 1833, p. 115.

"Sailors Snug Harbor," New-York Evening Post, October 29, 1831,
p. 2.

"The Sailors' Snug Harbor," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, LXVI
(January, 1873), 188-195.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural interest and merit: The Sailors' Snug Harbor is a home for aged seamen opened on Staten Island in 1833. This building, the first to be constructed for the institution, was built from 1831 to 1833. It is one of an outstanding group of five Greek Revival dormitories which overlook the Kill Van Kull leading into New York Harbor.

2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Description of Exterior

1. Number of stories: Two stories plus full basement above ground level.

2. Number of bays: The front (north) facade is three bays wide; the east and west sides are each eight bays wide.

3. Over-all dimensions: The front and rear facades measure approximately 62'-0"; the sides measure approximately 112'-0".

4. Layout, shape: The building is rectangular in plan.

5. Wall construction, finish and color: The front facade is of stone; the sides and rear are of brick laid up in Flemish bond and painted light yellow. Exposed stone basement walls are painted gray. There are stone pilasters at the corners of the building and a flat brick frieze on the east and west sides.

6. Porch: A two-story portico with eight Ionic stone columns extends the full width of the north facade; nine stone steps run the width of the portico. There is a stone balustrade on the east and west sides of the porch.

7. Chimneys: Metal smokestack near center of roof.

8. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: Wooden paneled doors with four-light window and with stained glass transom; wood and glass storm vestibule.
- b. Windows: Basement windows have three-over-six-light double-hung sash. First and second story windows have six-over-six-light double-hung sash; on the front facade the windows have stone pediments, and on the sides the windows have flat stone lintels and sills painted white. All sash is wooden.

9. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Low, gabled roof with modern shingles.
- b. Cornice: Wooden, painted white.

C. Description of Interior

1. Floor plans, by floor: First floor: Wide central hallway running north to south is bisected by a hallway running east to west with arched opening at intersection; at center of hallways is a domed skylight. Doors open off both hallways to offices. In each of southeast and southwest corners is a large room, used for administrative offices. In the northwest corner are two adjoining offices used by the administration. In the northeast corner are adjoining rooms used as the superintendent's office; doorways open onto the north-south hallway. Second floor: Bedrooms open onto hallway which forms a balcony over the first floor.
2. Stairway: Fire stairway with iron treads and balusters opens off north-south hallway on east side.
3. Flooring: Hardwood floors have Greek key motif near walls and star motifs in center of north-south hallway.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls and ceiling are plastered; on the first floor there is wooden wainscoting. Walls are painted a rosy-cream color; near the ceiling at the second floor level is a decorative motif of ropes and pulley, painted brown. The ceiling is vaulted and has an oval domed skylight. The dome has an iron gate motif painted on green ground; the rest of the ceiling is painted with nautical designs.

5. Doorways: The superintendent's office has paneled wooden sliding doors, evidently original, separating the two offices. Other office doors which open onto the hallways are of wood and glass with stained glass transoms. On the second floor doors are of paneled wood with stained glass transom.
6. Lighting: The central space is lighted by the skylight and by electrical lights at the edge of the balcony. The administrative offices have fluorescent lights.
7. Heating: Central.

D. Site and Surroundings

1. Orientation: The front facade faces north. This is the center building of the group of five dormitories.
2. Sidewalks: Stone.

Note: For additional photographs of the building see photo-data book for The Sailors' Snug Harbor, HABS No. NY-5473.

Prepared by Diana S. Waite
Architectural Historian
June, 1968

Addendum To

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